

Sharing the Good News

from the pen of the Mission Interpreter



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The Past *Ain't* Through With Us

The character Jimmy Gator in the 1999 film *Magnolia* quips, "And the book says 'We might be through with the past, but the past *ain't* through with us.'" At its best, the past can evoke nostalgic memories of years gone by. At its worst, the past can seem like a burden, weighing down our prospects for the future. By faith we look forward to God's promise of a future with hope. The sin that separates us from trust in the promise of God, though, needles the soul with the stark reminder, "the past ain't through with us."

The exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt into freedom is commemorated during **Lent** as a journey from an oppressive past into a hopeful, promised future. In selecting their leader, God looked not to a forward-thinking champion, though, but to Moses, a man with a past that often may have felt oppressive or constraining. The people's journey from slavery under Pharaoh to freedom in the promised land mirrored Moses' own transformative journey, from self-imposed exile born of guilt, to a new identity as a servant of God toward a hopeful future.

Born a Hebrew at the time Pharaoh demanded the death of all Hebrew boys, Moses' mother hid him in a basket where he was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter. Raised by his birth mother, Moses was later taken as a son by Pharaoh's daughter. As an adult, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Carefully looking to make sure there were no witnesses, Moses killed the Egyptian and buried the body. Within a day, Moses realized he didn't get away so easily with his crime. Others knew about it, including Pharaoh, who wanted him dead. Even the Hebrews, his own people, saw him as a murderer. Moses fled the country, going to Midian, hoping to live out his life quietly as a shepherd.

But God had other plans. In God's hands, Moses' future wasn't limited by his past.. Born a slave, separated from his family, and rejected as a criminal by both Hebrew and Egyptian, Moses' past would seem to dictate his future. But God interceded, calling Moses to return to Egypt, "take hold of the promise," and lead the people to freedom.

The effects of decisions made in the past—political, environmental, social, personal—can certainly be felt in the world today and seem to dictate the future. But **Lent** is a story of a weighty past to a bright future—spiritually as we receive the gift of grace from God in Christ for our salvation, and materially, as God invites us to accompany our neighbors in meeting our daily challenges with hope, courage and transformative work toward change. In their exodus the Hebrews were set free spiritually, to be the people of God in a new land, and, materially, to be free people liberated from the yoke of the past.

The past may not be through with us. But neither is God. And that makes the difference—for Moses, for the Hebrews, for us.